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C O N F I D E N T I A L AMMAN 006473

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: GOJ SPOKESWOMAN BRISTLES AT REPORTS OF ISRAELI
OPPOSITION TO AMRAAM SALE

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires David Hale for Reasons 1.5 (b),(d)

SUMMARY

1. (U) The GOJ reacted angrily to Israeli media reports August 1 claiming that Israel is trying to block the U.S. sale of AMRAAM missiles to Jordan. Minister of State and Government Spokeswoman Asma Khader alleged that Israeli opposition to the arms deal was in response to Jordan's strong stance against the separation barrier being constructed in the West Bank. Khader added that Jordan was interested in diversifying its sources of military purchases, a point made earlier by King Abdullah with Chinese officials during an official visit to Beijing. End Summary.

UP IN ARMS OVER MISSILES

2. (U) On August 1, Israeli daily Haaretz reported that the government of Israel was trying to scrap a U.S.-Jordanian arms deal to sell AMRAAM missiles for use in Jordanian airplanes. Later the same day, Government Spokeswoman Khader denounced the alleged Israeli campaign against the AMRAAM sale, stating, "This is a Jordanian internal issue, and we do not accept any interference under any circumstances." Furthermore, although Haaretz claimed that the GOI was acting out of concern that a Jordanian AMRAAM purchase could lead to a similar acquisition by Egypt, Khader accused Israel of seeking to penalize the GOJ for its active stance in international fora against the Israeli separation barrier.

3. (C) In a conversation with EmbOffs on August 2, Khader said that she was particularly upset over a quote from an unnamed Israeli political source in the Haaretz article asserting that Jordan did not need advanced weaponry since Israel would come to Jordan's aid if attacked. Jordan, she declared, was responsible for its own security and would not rely on Israel for protection.

GOJ LOOKING EAST?

4. (U) In her August 1 public statement, Khader also announced that Jordan was interested in purchasing weapons from new sources, a point made earlier by King Abdullah on August 30 (prior to the Haaretz report) during an official visit to China. Specifically, after meeting with Chinese President Hu Jintao, the King stated that Jordan intended to diversify its sources of military purchases and accordingly was looking at China given its advanced military industry.

COMMENT

5. (C) Given the solid, strategic security relationship between Israel and Jordan, Jordanian officials will be confused and angry over active Israeli opposition to the AMRAAM purchase -- especially as they see Israel as a beneficiary of enhanced Jordanian air defenses. Israel's stance will also be used by anti-normalization elements in Parliament to embarrass defenders of the Israel/Jordan relationship on the very point most frequently cited in favor of the peace treaty, its role in preserving Jordan's security. Khader's unfortunate - and inaccurate - explanation of Israel's motives contrasts with that of Israeli sources, which have emphasized the concerns relate solely to fear that Egypt will be more likely to acquire AMRAAM if the Jordan deal proceeds. This is another example of Khader's penchant for statements which fuel problems, rather than solve them. She admitted to one Embassy officer on August 2 that she really didn't know what she was talking about when she responded on the AMRAAM issue -- a rare moment of accuracy for the spokeswoman.

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HALE